



Coping With COVID-19: Stress Management Strategies for Seniors

The outbreak of the novel coronavirus is causing worry and anxiety for many of us, and can be especially stressful for seniors, a vulnerable population. Fear of the disease can cause strong emotions and reactions. Further isolation because of social distancing can add to the sense of being overpowered.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, stress reactions during an infectious disease outbreak include:

- Fear and anxiety about your own health and the health of your loved ones
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs

Coping effectively with the stress can make you, the people you care about, and your community stronger. Create a schedule of things to do that are the most supportive for you:

- Take breaks from watching, reading or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting.
- Make time to unwind: take a bath, read or listen to a book, work on crafts, go for a walk, watch a funny television show or movie, take a nap.
- Exercise. The National Institute on Aging has an exercise campaign called [Go4Life](#) that includes online video workouts.
- Keep in touch with family and friends by phone or video chatting. There are lots of free apps so you can make virtual face-to-face connections, including Apple's [FaceTime](#), [Google Hangouts](#), [Facebook video chat](#), and [Skype](#). Someone can talk you through how to install/use them.
- If you feel lonely or overwhelmed, you can call the Institute on Aging's [Friendship Line](#) at **1-800-971-0016**. It is both a crisis intervention hotline and a warmline for non-emergency emotional support calls.
- Look for volunteer opportunities you can do through smartphone apps, online, or by phone. Click [here](#) to see a list compiled by Good Morning America.
- Take deep breaths, stretch and/or meditate. Click [here](#) to access some guided meditations and meditation advice.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness involves keeping your attention in the present moment, without judging it as happy or sad, good or bad. The goal is to simply observe. Mindfulness allows you to calmly and consciously accept whatever is happening, moment to moment.

How to Practice Mindfulness

1. Sit comfortably on the floor or a chair with your back, neck, and head straight, but not stiff.
2. Set a timer, 5 minutes for beginners. You can increase the time as you become more accustomed to the practice.
3. Put your attention on your breathing, noticing the feeling of air passing in and out of your nostrils.
4. When your attention wavers (it will), observe where your mind went. You may experience impatience, think about tasks you need to accomplish, feel an itch or other sensation, or recall a memory.
5. After acknowledging the experience, return your attention to your breath.
6. Use your breath as an anchor. Each time a thought or feeling arises, momentarily acknowledge it. Don't analyze or judge it. Just observe it and return to your breathing.

The practice of mindfulness is linked to positive changes in memory, learning and emotion. Considerable research has demonstrated the benefits of mindfulness practice in relieving stress, easing pain, improving concentration, and relieving a variety of other symptoms.

We can all get through this together. If you are feeling overwhelmed by the COVID-19 situation, contact NewBridge Services at (973) 316-9333 or (888) 746-9333.